

proverb says that "possession is nine-tenths of the law"), and that he held the title deeds.

There was, however, no proof that he had not unlawfully broken into the property or stolen the title deeds, or (even if he himself was quite honest and *bonafide*) that some predecessor in title had not done one of these things; and that the rightful owner might not come along and claim the property.

As far back as the reign of Henry the Eighth, and even earlier, this difficulty was felt, and some form or other of registration of title deeds was provided by statute, practically the whole of which proved ineffective as it was not compulsory.

In 1708 an Act was passed at the express request of "the gentlemen and freeholders of the county of Middlesex/" establishing a deeds registry for the county of Middlesex (Middlesex Registry Act, 1708, 7 Anne, c. 20). This registry—the Middlesex Deeds Registry—still exists, and all title deeds conveying property situate in the county of Middlesex have to be registered there. The activity of the Registry is, however, for reasons explained later, now confined to that part of the county of Middlesex which is outside the county of London. About the same period as the establishment of this Registry, similar

registries
were established for the three Ridings
(West, East,
and North) of the county of York.

The Middlesex Registry has (in
recent times)
failed to confer any substantial benefit
upon the
public. In 1870 a Royal Commission
unanimously
reported that it caused " an increase of
trouble and
expense/" and afforded no "security
or other
special advantage/" and recommended
its abolition
"from as early a date as
possible/" This